



**U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas**

**Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Shana Jones, Special Assistant  
Daryl Fields, Public Information Officer  
(210) 384-7440

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**FEDERAL GRAND JURY CHARGES MOTHER AND DAUGHTER  
IN EXTORTION / RANSOM CASE**

**United States Attorney Johnny Sutton** announced that in El Paso today, a federal grand jury returned an indictment against a mother and daughter in connection with an extortion / ransom investigation.

The indictment charges 40-year-old Maria Gloria Hernandez-Castillo, a Mexican citizen residing in Juarez, and her daughter, 21-year-old Sara Jahzeel Gonzalez, a Mexican national living in El Paso, with one count each of receiving the proceeds of extortion and receiving or possessing ransom money. Upon conviction of both charges, the defendants face up to 13 years in federal prison.

Alleged in court documents, on March 25, 2007, the defendants knowingly collected \$65,000 in ransom money from Elaine Luchene. Luchene had traveled from Chicago to El Paso to secure the release of her friend, Charlie Waters. At the time, Waters was being held captive in Juarez by unknown individuals until he settled an alleged drug debt. Court records indicate that he had been held for approximately 6 weeks while Luchene raised the money to secure his release. FBI agents arrested Hernandez and Gonzalez in El Paso following the ransom exchange.

Hernandez remains in federal custody; Gonzalez was released on a \$10,000 bond on April 6, 2007. The defendants are scheduled to be arraigned on April 27, 2007, before U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael McDonald.

This continuing investigation is being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney William F. Lewis is prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

**An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.**

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